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AUTHOR Cohn, Mary; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This document describes the resettlement of Hmong refugees in Orange County, California: what their employment experience has been, which resettlement efforts have been successful, and how current efforts could be altered to improve the Hmong's long term adjustment. The report is part of a larger, national project on Hmong resettlement. Much of the data was gathered through personal interviews with Hmong living in Orange County and resettlement workers involved with this group. The first section of the report gives general information about Orange County and describes what welfare benefits, housing, and refugee services are available, as well as how receptive the community is to refugees. Section II gives brief information on the local Hmong population who, according to one source, numbered approximately 3,000 in 1983. Section III deals with employment and education issues: what jobs are available; how limited English skills affect employment and how these obstacles are being combatted; the problem of welfare as a disincentive both for work and education; the availability of job training; how Hmong students are faring in school; and adult language instruction. The final section describes the long range problems and expectations for the Hmong in Orange County, including the increasing mental health problems, particularly of the middle aged and older members of the population; and how the young Hmong view their possibilities in the United States. (CG)

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THE HMONG RESETTLEMENT STUDY

SITE REPORT:

ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

June 1984

Prepared for:

Office of Refugee Resettlement
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, S.W., Room 1229
Switzer Building
Washington, DC 20201

Ms. Toyo Biddle, Government Project Officer

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Submitted by:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Literacy & Language Program
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

Stephen Reder, Project Director

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THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED BY:

Mary Cohn

With the Assistance of:

Stephen Reder, Project Director
Shur Vang Vangyi
Dang Vang
Thongsay Vang

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PREFACE

The Hmong Resettlement Study is a national project funded by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. The study is the joint undertaking of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Portland, Oregon), the University of Minnesota and Lao Family Community (Santa Ana, California). The major purposes of the Study are to examine closely the resettlement of Hmong refugees in the United States, focusing on the following issues:

What has been the resettlement experience of the Hmong?

- How are the Hmong faring in terms of employment, dependence, and adjustment?
- Are there areas of employment in which the Hmong have been particularly successful?
- What do resettlement workers and the Hmong regard as the major impediments to effective Hmong resettlement and self-sufficiency?
- What role does secondary migration play in the resettlement of the Hmong? What are the reasons for secondary migration among this group? What are the implications for resettlement strategies?

What resettlement efforts and economic strategies have provided effective results for the Hmong?

- How are problems being handled? What kinds of solutions are being tried, by different resettlement communities and by the Hmong themselves?
- How many and what kinds of entrepreneurial economic development projects involving the Hmong are currently in operation, e.g., farming projects, Pa ndau cooperatives? How were they developed and how successful are they?
- What kinds of Hmong employment strategies have been particularly successful?

How might current strategies be changed to result in more effective resettlement and long-term adjustment of the Hmong?

- How might resettlement be conducted differently for the Hmong? What new projects and approaches are being considered by those involved in Hmong resettlement? How would the Hmong want resettlement to be done differently?

- How can the Hmong be resettled in a way that better utilizes their strengths and unique characteristics?

- What do the Hmong want for themselves? What do Hmong view as essential for effective resettlement? What are their goals for the future? For the next generation of Hmong?

Research conducted in the project included analysis of existing data about the Hmong, compilation of information gathered through numerous informal face-to-face and telephone conversations with Hmong informants across the country (in nearly every Hmong settlement which could be identified) and on-site observations, group meetings and personal interviews with Hmong individuals and families (as well as resettlement officials, service providers and members of the host communities). On-site case studies of Hmong resettlement were conducted in seven selected cities:

Orange County, California
Fresno, California
Portland, Oregon
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Providence, Rhode Island

Staff from the participating institutions worked as a team to conduct the overall project and the seven case studies:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Stephen Reder, Project Director
Mary Cohn
John Finck (also with State of Rhode Island)
Michael Sweeney (also with Portland Public Schools)
Bruce Thowpaou Bliatout (also with City of Portland)
Karen Reed Green
William Hadley
Marshall Hurlich (also with University of Washington)
Dan X. Mua (also with Portland Public Schools)

University of Minnesota

Bruce Downing, Subproject Director
Simon Fass
Doug Olney
Sarah Mason
Glenn Hendricks

Lao Family Community

Shur Vang Vangyi, Subproject Director
Dang Vang
Thongsay Vang

The Project Officer for the Office of Refugee Resettlement was Ms. Toyo Biddle.

The results of the project are available to the public as a series of reports published by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). Copies may be ordered from:

Dr. Allan Gall
Office of Refugee Resettlement
330 C Street, S.W.
Switzer Building, Room 1229
Washington, D.C. 20201

or

Mr. Bud Tumy
Refugee Materials Center
U.S. Dept. of Education
324 E 11th Street, 9th floor
Kansas City, Missouri 64104

Reports

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Executive Summary (written in English)
Executive Summary (written in Lao)
Executive Summary (written in Hmong)

Site Reports: Orange County, California
Fresno, California
Portland, Oregon
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Providence, Rhode Island

For further information about the Hmong Resettlement Study, contact either:

Dr. Stephen Reder
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503) 248-6800

Dr. Bruce Downing
SARS
124 Klaeber Court
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 376-3486

Ms. Toyo Biddle
Office of Refugee Resettlement
330 "C" Street, SW
Switzer Building, Room 1229
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 245-1966

Details of Fieldwork in Orange County

Fieldwork for the Orange County portion of the Hmong Resettlement Study was conducted between April 22 and May 4, 1983. Project staff, Stephen Reder and Mary Cohn, visited Orange County during that period and conducted the group meetings and interviews, together with Shur Vang Vangyi, Dang Vang and Thongsay Vang. Individual interviews were conducted by Dang Vang and Thongsay Vang in the week following, May 9 through May 15.

The fieldwork included meetings and discussions with American resettlement workers in Orange County and Hmong leaders and knowledgeable individuals, as well as individuals in families. These family members were chosen from lists of Lao Family Association membership to represent a variety of employment types, ages and living situations.

Hmong informants were chosen for their position in the community as traditional leaders or elders, for their knowledge of community issues, or for their standing as bilingual liaisons with the American community. We sought opposing points of view and different areas of expertise and experience.

For all meetings, bilingual interpreters were present. Group meetings and individual interviews were carried out in Hmong, unless participants were Hmong-English bilinguals.

Hmong Meetings and Interviews

First, a group entry meeting was called, open to any interested community members. About 20 men came to this meeting. Then two meetings were held of household heads, one in Santa Ana and one in Westminster--about the same number of men attended these meetings.

In addition, a meeting of Hmong high school students was held, attended by five girls and six boys. A Hmong college students' meeting was attended by five students. The fieldwork also included a meeting for women only, which was attended by 27 women.

Staff talked to eight Hmong informants:

- Director, Lao Family Community
- Community elders (two)
- Welfare eligibility workers (two)
- Church leader (one)
- Student leader (one)
- School bilingual aides (two)

Staff also interviewed nine Hmong individuals in families, representing:

- One female head of household, unemployed
- Parents, aged 25-50, including:
  - One mother, employed, and father, unemployed (in same household)
  - Three male heads of household, employed
  - One male head of household, unemployed
  - Two elder heads of household, over 55, unemployed

American Resettlement and Service Provider workers interviewed included:

- One County refugee affairs coordinator
- One job trainer
- One ESL teacher
- One high school teacher
- One welfare supervisor
- One VOLAG director
- One staff member, IRPC
- One employer of Hmong

In addition, innumerable informal contacts were made over the telephone to other Hmong and American informants to obtain background data and fill in gaps not covered in interviews during the field visit.

It is our policy not to name individuals in field studies, but we do wish to acknowledge the kind cooperation and assistance of the Hmong community in Orange County and of the numerous service providers who gave their time to the study. Their help was invaluable, and we could not have completed the work without them. The authors have attempted to portray the views of all participants as accurately as possible. Any errors in fact or interpretation of information presented in this report are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Secondary Data

Local and national data were also used to prepare this report. The sources of data are identified in the text of the report.

I

GENERAL CONTEXT

Setting, Climate and General Population

Orange County lies along 42 miles of the Southern California coast between Los Angeles and San Diego. Most of the county extends east to the mountains and desert. Most of the population, estimated at 1,993,850 in 1982, is located in the northwest part of the county and along the coast. The climate is mild, with moderate year-round temperatures and little rain. The climate and economy have combined in Orange County to make it an attractive place to live, and the population has grown steadily in recent years. According to the 1980 U.S. Census data, 10% of the population in Orange County had lived in another state in 1975. Both in terms of population and economy, Orange County has been a California "boom town" in the last decade.

Other Minority Groups

By far the largest and most influential minority population in Southern California and in Orange County is the Hispanic group. This group includes both native-born Mexican-Americans, including families who have been in California for many generations, and more recent immigrants from Mexico. The 1980 Census lists 14.8% of the population of Orange County as of Spanish origin. In Santa Ana, the incorporated city in which a large portion of the Hmong in the county now live, Hispanics make up 44% of the population. According to data of the same census, Blacks comprise only 1.3% of the population in Orange County and 4.0% in Santa Ana. In the 1980 Census figures, Hmong are included with Asians and Pacific Islanders--Asians out-

number Blacks in Orange County (4.5%) and all the incorporated areas where there are substantial numbers of Hmong.

Orange County is home to between 40,000 and 65,000 refugees,[1] more refugees than live in the entire state of Texas, the state with the largest number of refugees after California. The county has less than 1% of the nation's population but 8-10% of its Indochinese refugees (County of Orange, 1982). In Santa Ana, refugees comprise 7.7% of the population and in Westminster 9.9% (Baldwin, 1982). Orange County has been a center for refugee resettlement since the end of the war in Vietnam. In 1975, a base population of about 12,000 refugees sponsored by local agencies was established in Orange County from nearby Camp Pendleton. By 1976, another 6,000 secondary migrant refugees had also moved into Orange County. This first wave of refugees was almost entirely Vietnamese. Although estimates vary, at least three-quarters of the refugees now in Orange County are Vietnamese.

A second wave of refugee entry into Orange County began in 1977 and by 1982 almost half of the refugees in Orange County were second-wave refugees who had left their home countries after 1977. This group tended to have less education and exposure to American ways of life than the first wave and included the Hmong, as well as other Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian refugees. The Department of Social Services' (DSS) rough estimates at the end of 1981 showed a refugee profile of 82% Vietnamese and Ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, 13% Lao and Hmong and 5% Cambodian. At present, the Southeast Asian population is centered in the six cities of Anaheim, Santa Ana, Garden Grove,

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[1]These are estimates of the Orange County Department of Social Services and the Immigrant and Refugee Planning Center and other informants. The approximations cover such a wide range because of secondary migration and difficulties in counting persons who no longer receive public services.

Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach and Westminster. The Vietnamese in particular have made a visible impact on the communities where they live. Vietnamese shopping centers with stores, professional offices and restaurants are a common sight in Santa Ana, Westminister and Huntington Beach. Because of the numbers and visibility of the Vietnamese, "refugee" in Orange County is often associated in the minds of the general population with "Vietnamese," and the Hmong are often confused with a group which has a very different historical, cultural and educational background.

Economic Base and Employment

Orange County is a wealthy county. In the last four years, the unemployment rate has been consistently among the lowest in Southern California; in 1980, when many Hmong were resettling in the area, it had the lowest unemployment of any of the SMSA's in California, 4.1%, compared to the overall level of unemployment in California of 6.5%. The unemployment rates for the last four years are shown below:[2]

Year	Percent
1980	4.4
1981	4.5
1982	5.8
1983	5.0

The economy in Orange County took a downturn from 1981 to 1982 reflecting the overall recession in the nation, but appeared to be improving slightly in the first quarter of this year.

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[2]From State of California, Employment Development Department statistics as presented in their 1981 Orange County analyses.

According to the U.S. Census data, the per capita income of Orange County was $9,569 in 1980, and $22,557 for households--higher than any other area of Southern California. However, 1981 State Employment Development figures show average hourly earnings of production workers at $8.44, compared to a $9.00 state-wide average. The percentage of population listed as below the poverty level for this period was 7.3%, as compared to a California average of 11.4%.

Orange County's single most important industry in 1981 was manufacturing, which at that time provided about a quarter of all employment in the county. Most of this manufacturing is in the aerospace and high technology industry--computer, communications and electronic equipment. Manufacturing was followed by trade (24.1%), services (20.9%), government (12.0%), aerospace (8.8%), finance, real estate and insurance (7.1%) and construction (5.7%). In contrast to neighboring counties, Orange County's industry is largely non-unionized. The context the Hmong encountered in first coming to Orange County offered particularly favorable employment prospects for them: There were plentiful jobs, few unions and growing industries which demanded little English, experience or lengthy training to start working.

Welfare Benefits and Regulations

To disentangle the complex relationships which have evolved between working and welfare in the Hmong community of Orange County, it is important to understand the assistance programs available in the area and the choices that the needy have.

Other than SSI and California State Supplementary programs for aged or disabled, there are three types of assistance programs utilized by refugees in Orange County. Since the regulations and payment schedules for these programs are closely interrelated, it is not surprising that recipients may view their

assistance over the years as one continuous cash-aid program, when in fact they may actually have been helped under three separate programs--Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Unemployed Parent (AFDC-U), or General Relief (GR).

Refugee Cash Assistance is a federal program which provides cash assistance to refugees who are determined needy and eligible in their first eighteen months in the United States. In California, as in other states, RCA assistance levels are generally equivalent to AFDC or "welfare" payments. Until the spring of 1982, refugees could receive RCA for up to 36 months after arrival, but in April 1982, this period was cut to 18 months. If a refugee family in California qualifies for AFDC or AFDC-U, they will be placed on the regular AFDC or AFDC-U caseload; this determination should be made before considering eligibility for RCA. The federal government reimburses the state and county for these payments to refugees for 36 months, after which a family is "time expired." If a family still needs assistance after 36 months, their aid is subject to the same regulations and comes from the same sources as for any other needy person in Orange County. In these cases, the sharing of costs among federal, state and county agencies varies according to programs and regulations.

AFDC and AFDC-U are entitlement cash aid programs available for families with children under 18. If the needy household is headed by a single parent, the household qualifies for AFDC. If there are two parents in the household, and neither is working, they qualify for AFDC-U. Because they tend to have intact families, most Hmong who are on assistance are in the AFDC-U program. To remain eligible for AFDC or AFDC-U, the head of a household (primary wage earner) can work no more than 100 hours per month, regardless of the pay he or

she receives. Any earnings made under the 100 hours are counted in determination of the next month's welfare payment. For the first four months a family is on AFDC or AFDC-U in Orange County, $30 plus one-third of the income is excluded as income for grant determination. Previously, the RCA program had a $30 plus one-third exclusion policy, but this was also discontinued in the spring of 1982.

Refugees who are no longer eligible for RCA, which includes most of the Hmong now living in Orange County, and who have no dependent children but still need public assistance can apply for help under the General Relief program (GR), which is entirely a county-funded program. Persons seeking GR must conform to a strict work-search or GR work program. Unlike AFDC, GR is a cost-reimbursement program so amounts granted to individuals vary with the cost of their rent and other living expenses up to a maximum. Individuals who receive GR and food stamps must apply separately for medical assistance. Until January 1983, GR recipients were usually eligible for state medical coverage and were mailed MediCal cards monthly. Now they are helped through the County Indigent Medical Program, eligibility for which is determined at the time they receive medical services, and coverage is limited to more serious illnesses.

A study conducted by Orange County in October 1981 of welfare utilization and self-sufficiency tracked refugees who first applied for cash assistance in July and August of 1979 (County of Orange, 1982). Cash assistance had been used by the great majority of refugees in Orange County. There were 242 cases included, 74% of whom were Vietnamese. Of refugees initially settled in Orange County, 90% used aid in their first six months after arrival, but 143 of the 242 had become financially self-sufficient by late October 1981. In this study, English speaking ability and literacy skills were shown to be

strongly associated with self-sufficiency. Ninety-five percent of the self-sufficient members of this study were judged to be literate by their caseworkers, whereas only 7.9% of those who were not yet self-sufficient were judged literate.

Low-Income Housing

In Orange County, refugees are eligible to apply for low-income housing on the same basis as any other resident. However, HUD Section 8 housing is inadequate for the needs of most refugees in the area. The cost of housing in Orange County is extremely high. Rental units for large families are scarce and overcrowded. According to the Orange County Plan for Refugee Resettlement (1982), the influx of refugees exacerbated the already existing shortage of low cost rental housing in Orange County and stimulated further competition between refugees and other low-income residents.

The high cost of housing has a direct impact on refugee self-sufficiency. Even in the best of situations, the housing costs for a large family often exceed the earning capacity of the family (County of Orange, 1982). Hmong leaders and individuals as well as resettlement workers cite high housing costs as one of the major contributing factors to the current Hmong migration out of Orange County to the Central Valley area and as a reason for continued dependence on welfare. One employed Hmong with seven people in his household explained how high housing costs have influenced his decision to move to the Merced area:

> The rents here are too high. My four bedroom house costs $600 a month with utilities separate. I earn $700 a month, plus I get $100 a month in food stamps. I tried hard to work after I got here, but I think due to rent and utilities being so high, I cannot stay off welfare. If I go up there and manage my brother's store, I think I will be able to support my family and the rental is cheaper there, too.

The 1980 Census data reveals the median monthly cost for renter-occupied housing in Orange County to be $336 per month. This median rent should be compared to median rent cited in the 1980 Census Report for Fresno at $199. Hmong renters say that rents have climbed steadily since then, with $500 and $600 a month rent common for Hmong households. Buying a home in Orange County is prohibitive: The median value of owner-occupied homes for 1980 is listed at $108,000 for the SMSA in Santa Ana, Anaheim/Garden Grove, compared to a California average of $84,700. Earnings from employment have not kept pace with the rising cost of living in Orange County--between 1970 and 1981, production workers' hourly earnings rose 116 percent compared to a 137 percent increase in the consumer price index for the same period.

Refugee Services Available

Orange County has a range of services available for refugees. Some are refugee-specific, others are public services which refugees can use. Three different resettlement workers in Orange County told us that although they felt Orange County had responded well with services for refugees, most of the services were and still are designed for Vietnamese. Though Vietnamese are not the only refugees in Orange County, they were the first group to enter the county, and form the largest part of the refugee population. One resettlement worker said "the fact is, the Hmong don't get all these services, but they are grouped together with others in the public eye."

Another aspect of service delivery throughout California is the focus since 1981 on what have been labeled as "hard" services such as employment services, ESL, VESL, Vocational Training and Health, and the cuts in so-called "soft" services such as mental health counseling, information services, social

Church World Service (CWS)
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Lutheran Immigration and Relief Services (LIRS)
U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC)
World Relief Refugee Services (WRRS)
Presiding Bishops Fund of the Episcopal Church (PBF)

Orientation to the community is usually provided by the sponsor or VOLAG resettlement worker. VOLAGs also help new arrivals find housing, but refugees tend to help each other find low-income housing. Two Housing and Community Development funded projects, St. Anselm's IRCC and the Vietnamese League of Orange County, assist in locating housing and provide tenant advocacy.

Employment orientation, employment assessment and planning. After orientation, new arrivals are provided with a 12-hour World of Work job orientation program. Then, adult refugees are either provided employment services by their VOLAG or are referred to another agency for an employability assessment and employment planning. Through DSS guidelines, the counselor identifies the employability level as Level 1, in need of employment services only; Level 2, in need of more than employment services, but not in need of all services provided; or Level 3, in need of all services provided under this program.

Three employment service programs provide assessment and planning:

1. Refugee Job Center (at USCC) designated by the State to serve employable refugees in the country from 0-6 months, and time expired refugees in the country more than 36 months.

2. HSA/RRP Services Unit serves refugees receiving aid in the country 7-35 months.

3. EDD/WIN gives assessments and employment services to WIN registrants.

These agencies also provide job development, job placement, employment counseling and follow-up. Bilingual workers also assist in job retention and employer relations. There are no bilingual Hmong workers at EDD.

adjustment and translation services. Orange County resettlement workers still feel that soft services, especially mental health and social adjustment services, remain critical for the Hmong. Many of these services, once publicly funded, are now provided through family support networks or through overburdened volunteers at the mutual assistance associations. Many people are simply going without help in these areas. Before the adoption of state budget control language, Orange County had established local priorities for federal refugee social service funds. The priorities are (1) employment, (2) ESL, (3) support services, and (4) vocational training.

When Hmong first arrived in large numbers in Orange County (1978-1980), the social service system was already overwhelmed with refugees--staff was inadequate; bilingual capacity was not yet in place for Hmong. In the Orange County Plan for Refugee Resettlement, 1982, planners evaluate the social services available:

> Reductions in public funds for social services for fiscal year 1981-82 have resulted in the elimination of some programs and services. State funding decisions have resulted in a system employment assessment capacity too low to fill all available training slots. New State priorities, which do not coincide with those established locally by the Refugee Forum, have reduced the ability of several social services . . . the conflicting local, state and federal priorities must be resolved if public (and private) resources are to be used at maximum efficiency (County of Orange, 1982).

Below is a summary of services provided in Orange County, taken from the Orange County Plan for Refugee Resettlement (1982) and from limited interviews with service providers.

Reception and placement, orientation, housing. VOLAGs make first contact with newly arrived refugees and provide guidance in the initial resettlement process. The following VOLAGs are represented in Orange County:

The Orange County Plan points out that though all three agencies in 1981-82 had assessment capabilities, only one is authorized to refer refugees to ESL and vocational training classes. The authorized agency has not had enough funding to fill all available training slots, a difficulty which arose as a result of funding cuts and an attempt to reduce duplication of services.

ESL. Refugees who require ESL are referred to DSS contracted ESL service providers:

Huntington Beach Union High School District
Rancho Santiago Community College District
St. Anselms Immigrant and Refugee Community Center

Until 1982, bilingual (Hmong and English) ESL was also provided at Lao Family Community. Refugees also attend other adult school ESL programs in the area and community college English classes.

Vocational training. DSS funds two agencies to provide short-term vocational training: Lao Family Community, which provides electronics assembly training, and previously provided construction training was designed to assist Hmong and other refugees who are unable to perform in typical training programs. DSS also funds Rancho Santiago Community College District for classes in nursing assistant, pharmacy technician and electronic technician.

In Capturing the Change (1982), Baldwin also lists 10 community colleges, one adult school district, and three nonprofit, privately and federally funded programs offering vocational training in Orange County. However, all but two programs require some English. In addition, refugees participate in CETA programs and Job Corps programs offered in Orange County. Hmong leaders note that vocational training programs are inadequate for Hmong needs.

Health services. A range of screening, assessment, health care and health education programs are available for refugees in Orange County, including the

IRAP Urban Health initiative. Mental Health services have been cut back since December 1981, and very few private health and mental health resources exist for refugees, particularly Hmong, who now rely heavily on traditional kin networks and MAA support for mental health counseling.

Mutual assistance associations (MAAs). There are approximately 23 refugee self-help organizations in Orange County which have emerged as important contributors to the resettlement process. For the Hmong, Lao Family Community has provided assistance since 1977, particularly through its bilingual services strategy.

Bilingual services. Refugee access to services is sometimes limited by the availability of bilingual help in the agency or program. There were (as of May 1983) Hmong bilinguals in the following agencies:

Department of Social Services	1 social service assistant 5 eligibility workers (welfare) 1 job counselor
IRC	1 receptionist
USCC	1 job counselor
Health Services	1 WIC program 2 IRAP Urban Health Initiative
School Aides	4 at elementary and junior high schools

There are no Hmong working on the staff at EDD or at the Job Bank. Nor are there any Hmong bilinguals employed at the high schools or at the adult schools in Orange County.

Community Receptiveness to Refugees

Orange County has responded to the large number of refugees who have entered since 1975 with a range of services and a range of reactions. Both the private and public sector have taken an interest in refugees. When the

first wave of refugees entered Orange County, sponsors were easy to find. For example, every Catholic parish in the county sponsored at least one family. Orange County was noted for its relative warmth and tolerance to refugees, due perhaps to the wealth of the county and its high demand for labor in the late 1970's (Dave Pierce, quoted in Baldwin, 1982).

With the huge growth in refugee populations through initial placements and secondary migration, some backlash is becoming evident in this area, which has had a nationwide reputation for conservatism. The study conducted by the Immigrant and Refugee Planning Center (IRPC) in 1981 (Baldwin, 1982) included a survey of non-refugees and their reactions to their new neighbors. On the whole, Orange County residents were ambivalent toward refugees, although favorable comments outweighed nonfavorable reactions about refugee job performance, refugees as neighbors and as members of the community. However, some groups viewed refugees as receiving preferential treatment in social service programs, others saw them as a financial liability for the County. The study concluded that most of the negative reactions were based on myths and misconceptions about refugees.[3]

Most of the refugees in Orange County are Vietnamese. In terms of community reaction, this fact has had important implications for the Hmong. Hmong are often mistaken for Vietnamese, or are grouped together with the Vietnamese as "refugees," even though the groups are very different. Public

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[3]This survey, presented in Capturing the Change, is open to various interpretations, and was criticized by some refugee workers and Hmong leaders for inadequate analyses, too-broad scope and culturally inappropriate methodology, but it remains the only comprehensive survey data base for many aspects of Orange County refugee resettlement.

feeling toward Vietnamese, both positive and negative, is also felt by the Hmong. High school students note that most of their schoolmates assume they are Vietnamese; social services in Orange County tend to be designed for the Vietnamese.

Hmong in Orange County report some job discrimination, particularly by Hispanic supervisors. Interestingly, the IRPC survey showed that Hispanics usually hold more positive feelings toward refugees than other groups. On the whole, although Hmong do not feel they are totally accepted by residents of Orange County, community relations have been fairly smooth, with few neighborhood conflicts. Some note that they are occasionally called names and high school students mention that they are singled out for name calling and teasing, but only a small portion of their classmates demonstrate this hostility toward them. Although they don't socialize much with Americans, the students feel most are friendly toward them.

Hmong leaders note a growing concern in the Hmong community of Orange County regarding crime and dealings with police. One leader told us:

> The Hmong feel police are not adequately responsive to their needs. They see the police as authoritative, too conservative, and somewhat discriminatory toward refugees and Asians. With language barriers, most Hmong cannot communicate with the police. Some Hmong who can communicate feel that the police are not helpful.

Major complaints about crime and police protection are that police are not adequately responsive to calls from Hmong, take too long to arrive after a call, and that they discriminate against Hmong; Hmong perceive this to be a particular problem when Hispanic police deal with them, especially when the person who has victimized Hmong is a Hispanic. Hmong also perceive that police have not taken adequate measures to be sure that the language and cultural barrier between police and Hmong are overcome--there are no Hmong

aides or police on the force. The leader cited above mentioned dozens of cases which had been brought to him in which police protection or help was considered inadequate; now, he says, Hmong have lost their faith in the police in Orange County and may be hesitant to call them even when there is a need.

II

LOCAL HMONG POPULATION

Size

Orange County is one of the older Hmong communities in the United States. There was already an established core of Hmong in the area before the major wave of incoming Hmong began in 1979. By January 1977, according to Lao Family Community estimates, there were 1,200 Hmong in Orange County. The estimated number of Hmong since 1976 is listed in Table II-1 below.

Table II-1

HMONG POPULATION OF ORANGE COUNTY
(Lao Family Community Estimates)

Time of Year	Total Population
January 1976	200
June 1976	600
December 1976	900
January 1977	1,200
1978	2,000
1979	4,500
1980	5,000
1981	6,500
1982	3,500
1983	3,000[4]

History of Settlement

From 1976 to 1981, the Hmong population of Orange County grew steadily. The largest growth occurred in 1979 with the influx of Hmong resettling directly from the camps in Thailand. The decline in population corresponds

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[4]This study was conducted in April and May, 1983. As of September 1983 while this report was being revised, the same source noted the population in Orange County may be as low as 2,000.

closely with the economic patterns in Orange County. Orange County Hmong were both resettled directly from the camps, joining the core group which had already established itself, and migrated from other areas of the country.

Several factors made Orange County a magnet for secondary migration. Individuals mention the mild climate, schools, relatives and leaders who could speak English and help them as among the reasons for moving to Orange County, but the primary reason appears to have been economic betterment. Orange County had a reputation of being a place where Hmong could get jobs without knowing much English. At the time when Hmong began coming to Orange County, most were still eligible for RCA assistance, so welfare policy differences between states were not yet an important force behind secondary migration. Hmong wanted jobs and came to Orange County. From 1979-81, when jobs in Orange County were available, the cost of living was lower, and RCA regulations had not yet changed, Orange County was a good alternative for Hmong who were not successfully resettled in other parts of the country. A young woman told us why she and her husband moved to Southern California from Las Vegas in 1979:

> We moved because there was not a job in Las Vegas and also no ESL school for refugees. We had relatives in California who came earlier, so they could help us to look for a job or guide us on how to make a living in the American way.

A knowledgeable Hmong leader estimated the percentage of secondary migrants defined as Hmong who had moved from other cities or states as follows:

Table II-2

PERCENTAGE OF SECONDARY MIGRANTS IN
HMONG POPULATION IN ORANGE COUNTY
(Lao Family Estimates)

1976	2%
1977	5%
1978	10%
1979	25%
1980	30%
1981	40%

The percentage of Hmong now living in Orange County who are secondary migrants is estimated between 10% and 15%, about the same as 1978 levels. Although these figures seem low, several Hmong sources feel that those people who moved into Orange County as secondary migrants when the economy was booming have been more likely to move <u>again</u> to other areas, while those who established themselves early in Orange County have been more likely to stay on.

In 1981 and early 1982, the economy soured at about the same time as cash assistance and other types of help to refugees became more limited. Since 1981, Hmong have been leaving Orange County. As one leader puts it, "Hmong know that they cannot stay on welfare forever, they cannot wait for the economy to get better, so they have decided to leave Orange County." Further, housing costs have risen much faster than either wages or welfare benefits. Especially for large families, high housing costs make it increasingly difficult to meet living expenses. The hope that characterized the move into Orange County in the first place is not characteristic of the current move out of Orange County. Now, moving is more of a last resort. A Hmong man who had just been laid off after over three years on the job talked about moving:

> In Laos, my grandparents never moved before the war. They stayed in the same place. But here, it seems we keep moving around so we can depend on the government. The government must help us stay in one center. It's all right for the Hmong, whether they stay together in one place or live separately, as long as they stay in the same city. It is best not to move if you have a job. But for myself, if in case I cannot collect unemployment, I would move too to survive.

Of those who have left Orange County, some have gone to Arkansas with the hope of buying cheaper land to build their own homes, to farm and to raise cattle. Others have left for Texas to get jobs. According to one Hmong leader, everyone who left for Arkansas and Texas is now working.

The majority of Hmong who have left Orange County have moved north to Fresno, Visalia, Merced and Stockton in the Central Valley. They know there are no jobs there either, but the rent is much cheaper and at least some may be able to learn to farm the American way so that later they can do their own farming. Initially, employment status appears to have been related to a move to the Central Valley, as most who left were unemployed. A Hmong informant related that he knew of very few people who had jobs in Orange County who left, but that most of those who had been laid off did leave. One reason for leaving among those laid off is the long delay families experience in reapplying and obtaining welfare after being laid off, and the fact that it may be easier in that situation to get welfare in a different county.

The future of the out-migration from Orange County is unsure, but the rate of out-migration has slowed from the extensive losses between 1981 and 1982. However, now that the Hmong community in the Central Valley is so large, the strong magnet of family reunification continues to draw some Hmong away from Orange County, regardless of their employment status. Welfare workers have observed some cases of Hmong who had moved out of Orange County being reopened as the people move back to the area. Still, migration to the Central Valley

continues. Bilingual welfare workers note that there are a few cases every month on their caseloads moving north. Another Hmong informant said:

> People are moving around constantly. Every month people are moving north on my caseload. About 20-25% moved in the past year. At first, a lot of people came into Orange County from the East. Now, only a few come in. The new cases are mostly people who reapply for reassistance because they have been laid off.

There appears to be a core of people who plan to stay in Orange County if possible. Two bilingual caseworkers told us that they have never had a case where someone who was working quit a job and left Orange County. The characteristics of those who stay were summarized by a bilingual welfare worker: "Those who don't move are those who have goals, those who know what to do, and those who have smaller families." A 55-year-old man who had moved from Rhode Island explains why he will stay in Orange County:

> In Southern California the climate is good, the children are happier. Moving around is difficult, so for now I have decided to settle here as a permanent resident.

III

RESETTLEMENT ISSUES

Employment

Rate and Nature of Hmong Employment

Employment opportunity provided an important impetus to Hmong resettlement in Orange County. Abundant entry-level jobs which required little English or previous training attracted large numbers of secondary migrants to the area. Estimating percentages or even numbers of Hmong working in Orange County at any given period of time is difficult for several reasons.

First, data from surveys and studies such as the IRPC survey taken in 1981 or the 1982 DDS self-sufficiency tracking study are gathered using non-comparable sampling techniques and interview procedures. Second, Orange County Hmong are dispersed in three main cities in the county, and some of the more successful individuals have moved out of these areas altogether. Third, movements of the Hmong population are tied to the job market, so Hmong unemployment rates may appear the same because of out-migration, whereas actual numbers of employed have decreased.

A pattern of Hmong employment in Orange County can be pieced together through survey data, MAA estimates and estimates of selected traditional leaders and bilingual workers. Approximations of Hmong household heads employed in the last three years are:

1980-81	60%
1981-82	45-50%
1982-83	25-30%

The survey conducted by the Immigrant and Refugee Planning Center (IRPC) in June 1981 indicated that only 14 percent of the Hmong surveyed were

working. It is difficult to know why there is such a large discrepancy between these data and Hmong community estimates. It may be that household heads may in fact support one or two other "adults" in any extended family, reducing the percentage of "adults" working. For Hmong, the important economic unit of analysis is the household, rather than the individual adult. The director of Lao Family, in close contact with job seekers through the years, estimated that at the peak of Hmong employment in Orange County, two out of every three household heads had some kind of job.

Estimates of the current Hmong employment rate vary. One leader estimated that between 30 and 40% are employed--the same estimate was given by a bilingual welfare worker; another welfare worker estimated that between 10-15% of households have someone working; and the Lao Family estimate for current employment is about 25%. All informants agree that current employment, both in terms of actual numbers and percentage of adult Hmong population, is far below the preceding two years. Recent layoffs and unavailability of welfare income supplementation have contributed to this decline. At about the same time, employment began to decrease, cuts in refugee services became effective in California; many Hmong who arrived in 1979 passed their 36-month arrival anniversaries and were no longer eligible for RCA refugee aid. The decline in the numbers and percentage of Hmong working in the past two or three years has had implications for welfare dependence, the mental health of the community, and secondary migration. However, the opinions voiced at group meetings for this study, in which virtually all participants were unemployed, indicated that Hmong in Orange County are willing and eager to work and will take any job that will support their families at a level equivalent to public assistance. As a Hmong church leader told us: "The Hmong have the motivation, and they have the work ethic."

Areas of employment. Hmong work at many different kinds of jobs in Orange County, but the most commonly held jobs are factory jobs, particularly electronics and assembly and other types of light industrial work. Others are working as machinists, warehousemen, child care workers and flower sellers. Hmong with proficient English skills are also employed as social service workers. Some Hmong with training are working as electronic technicians and auto mechanics. Hmong bilingual workers and leaders identify assembly and mechanical jobs as jobs at which the Hmong perform best and in which they have had the most success in Orange County.

Finding jobs. According to working individuals interviewed, employment service and social service providers and bilingual service providers, the two usual strategies for finding jobs in Orange County are referral by friends who work in companies, and referral from voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) or County agencies, in particular the USCC Indochinese Job Service Center. Some Hmong with better English skills have secured employment by responding to ads in the newspaper or applying directly to factories. There is consensus among those Hmong with limited English and literacy skills that they need the help of a bilingual person, either a relative or agency worker, to help them fill out job applications and to introduce them to an employer. An employer who has hired 15-20 Hmong over the last three years told us that the first Hmong worker answered an ad in the newspaper, and he helped in the hiring of the other workers. According to welfare workers and leaders, very few Hmong seek jobs on their own without any help.

Income from employment. Working Hmong in Orange County usually start at minimum wage levels, except in certain machining and warehouse jobs, where the starting pay is higher. Individuals and community leaders interviewed indicated that those who maintain their jobs receive regular, though not

always large, pay raises, until they reach about $7 an hour. These pay raises have not kept up with the rising cost of living in the area, however.

In Capturing the Change (1982), Baldwin reports that in June 1981, 83% of refugee households earned less than $12,000 per year, 5% earned between $12,000-18,000, 8% received $18,000-24,000, and 4% had total household earnings of $24,000 or more. The same data showed 32% of Vietnamese, 83% of Laotian and 46% of Cambodian refugee households earn less than $12,000 annually.

Considering that 87% of Hmong households contained more than five people at that time and were likely to pay over $350 rent, average earnings allowed families to just subsist on earned income. During that same time period, however, 62% of all refugee households in Orange County who earned between $500 and $1,000 per month (about the income bracket of working Hmong) also received supplemental welfare.

Employment Profiles

The following Hmong employment and income profiles of seven employed or recently employed individuals interviewed in the course of the fieldwork for this study show a pattern which appears to be typical of Hmong employment in Orange County: more male workers, employment in light, high technology industry, entry at minimum wage with gradual pay increases, location of jobs through job service center[5] and recent termination of jobs due to layoffs or welfare supplement cutoffs:

1. Male, age 55, family of ten, no previous education, works at an optical products company, earns $700 a month, no benefits or insurance.

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[5]There are no examples in this sample of referrals by friends already working, probably because most of these people started working in 1979 or 1980.

2. Male, age 28, family of six, 2nd grade education, works as an electronics assembler. He has been working there for 1-1/2 years at a beginning salary of $3.78 an hour. He now earns $6.08. He found his job through USCC.

3. Male, age 36, family of five, 10th grade education, works as an electronics controller. He has worked there four years and now earns $5.30 an hour plus $150 a month bonus. He found his job through the newspaper.

4. Male, age 37, family of seven, no previous education, works as a machine operator. He has been working there for 2-1/2 years (his third job in the U.S.) at a beginning salary of $4 an hour and now earns $5 an hour. He found his job on his own.

5. Female, age 35 (approximately), no previous education, works as a child care worker, brings home $308.50 every two weeks. She is the wife of #6 below.

6. Male, age 50, family of 5 or 6, 6th grade education in Laos, laid off April 1983 from a factory manufacturing gem cutting tools. He had worked there four years with a beginning salary of $3.50 an hour. He earned $7.50 an hour when he was recently laid off.

7. Male, age 45, family of four, no previous education, worked as a boat painter for 2-1/2 years. Left June 1982 because he could not receive medical aid under welfare regulations since he was working full time. He had a beginning salary of $3.15 an hour and ended at $4.50 an hour.

Although the depressed economy and shrinking job market in the past two years have changed some expectations and perceptions of work, one feature of Hmong attitudes toward employment in Orange County remains clear: Hmong in Orange County want to work, but are having difficulty finding and keeping permanent, stable jobs. They are sensitive to being perceived as lazy or unwilling to work. One woman explained:

> The Hmong people are not lazy. We used to work ten or twelve hours a day. We came to this country, and no matter how much you are willing to work, there are no jobs. That makes some people think that Hmong people don't want to work, but that is not so. If there were jobs everyone would work, I think.

Some individuals have been very successful in jobs and are optimistic about their future in work. There are substantial barriers that still must be overcome in obtaining jobs and there are some strategies which have proved

successful for Hmong in locating and retaining jobs; both will be discussed below.

Barriers to Hmong Employment in Orange County and Strategies for Success

Besides the high unemployment of the recent recession, there are a few major obstacles which Hmong encounter in obtaining and keeping jobs in Orange County.

English. Hmong see lack of English as the primary reason they cannot find jobs. Many feel they cannot even go to apply for jobs, because they can't understand job applications or talk to the employer in an interview. Even though one reason Hmong came to Orange County was because of its reputation for having jobs where little English is needed, English is still seen as a prerequisite to getting jobs. One Hmong welfare worker told us that English is felt to be so important in getting good jobs that some people will postpone looking for jobs if they can go to school to learn more English. At a group meeting, several men expressed concern about failure to secure or keep work because of lack of English and previous education:

> Americans don't understand why the Hmong have no education; the war kept many people out of school, we were soldiers instead.
>
> Our problem here is too big--we have no English, no education, no jobs, no land: Please help us get our country back.

A 28-year-old man, now working, told us of his difficulties in getting a job because of limited English skills:

> I strongly believe that my English ability is the major thing that kept me from finding a job. After I completed my training program, I spent a lot of time trying to find a job by myself, but I couldn't because I couldn't speak English well. So most positions that I applied for, I didn't have any chance to get. If I could speak English better I would get a better job than the one I have now.

Hmong perceptions of the importance of English in securing employment do not appear exaggerated. When the IRPC survey (Baldwin, 1982) asked employers to list the major advantages and disadvantages of hiring Indochinese, the number one disadvantage listed was "language communication problems." One employer told us that although he is very satisfied with his Hmong workers, and he has a bilingual on staff to help with communication, he regrets not being able to talk directly with the Hmong employees. He noted that other firms are afraid to hire non-English speakers, and that many jobs presently available in Orange County do require a minimum level of English skills.

A January 9, 1983, article entitled "Employers and Refugees Gain in Translation" in the Orange County Edition of the Los Angeles Times deals extensively with refugees and employment in the county. It notes:

> The economic turnaround that has converted a labor shortage into a labor surplus meanwhile has worked a severe handicap on many Indochinese refugees, job counselors say. They note that employers have become more selective, requiring successful job applicants to have English fluency and often five years of work experience even for entry level positions.
>
> Joining the crowd of new refugee arrivals in the job hunt, counselors say, are many Indochinese who have been laid off from jobs they obtained a few years ago. The Indochinese have been among the first to lose their jobs in the recession, job counselors say, because they generally have low seniority.

Over the past two years, many Hmong have been laid off. Many had been working in Orange County since their arrival in 1979, had never attended English classes, and did not use English on the job. For these people, finding new jobs is a frightening and difficult prospect. A middle-aged man who had been recently laid off after four years on the job expressed his concern about finding a new job:

> I don't understand why they laid me off. I have done a really good job for them. I'm really worried about it. It's hard to get another job because of my language problem. At first, USC found me the job. There were no Hmong people where I worked then. At the beginning, they just showed me what to do. They don't talk too much on the job, so I don't need English.

Strategies for overcoming the language barrier. Hmong and employers in Orange County have successfully tried certain strategies to overcome the language barrier. Hmong go to Hmong bilingual job counselors at VOLAGs and public agencies and also ask Hmong friends and relative to help them find work. Sometimes, an English speaker accompanies people to a job interview. Unemployed Hmong at group meetings indicated that to find jobs, much more of this kind of bilingual help is needed. Perhaps the most consistently successful strategy for dealing with English problems is placing a bilingual Hmong employee at the worksite who can help hire and train new Hmong employees and recruit Hmong workers. This strategy has worked in the few companies who have tried it in Orange County, but its implementation has been more by chance than by design, since English-speaking Hmong tend to get employment first and later tell their friends and relatives about openings in the company. A successful example of this strategy is presented in Volume 3 of this Study's Final Report. Whether this strategy has meant less layoffs for Hmong workers is hard to tell, but informants note that companies seemed more willing in 1979-1981 to hire non-English speakers if a bilingual person was already working in the company. Now, as one Hmong leader told us, "they want everyone to speak English." DSS informants note, on the other hand, that there are still some entry level jobs available for limited English speakers.

Discrimination. Although discrimination is hard to prove, both unemployed and employed Hmong we talked with feel employers discriminate against Hmong in hiring and promotion. A job trainer told us that American employers are "scared to hire non-Americans and people without experience in an American work setting." An electronics assembly supervisor, himself an Asian-American, told us, "let's face it, discrimination is a fact of life." Whatever the

reality, the perception of discrimination may be as important as the fact, since it discourages people from continuing to seek employment or advancement.

Participants at group meetings related several incidents in which persons they perceived to have lower qualifications were hired or promoted over Hmong with similar or better qualifications. During the course of this study, by chance, an employer interviewed by one staff member turned out to be the supervisor of an individual interviewed by another staff member. The differences in the perceptions of these two are telling. The supervisor related again and again how pleased he was with his Hmong employees, how much he likes them and that they liked him. The employee, on the other hand, was unhappy with his job because he thought that his supervisor didn't like him or the other Hmong and was trying to get rid of him by promoting other people ahead of him.

Hmong leaders mention that people do not always understand lay-offs and believe that they lose their jobs because employers do not like them or do not like Hmong. As a Hmong man who had just been laid off expressed: "They didn't like me as much after I reached $7 an hour. It seems like they singled me out."

Strategies for overcoming discrimination. Over the years, Orange County has had some public relations efforts to inform employers on needs and skills of refugee workers. The Orange County Department of Social Services and IRPC (a private group) as well as Lao Family Community have undertaken such efforts as media coverage, cross-cultural workshops and various job development efforts for employers. Tangible results of these kinds of efforts are always difficult to perceive; a Hmong leader saw "talk but not action" in them; a DSS refugee worker felt that employers were more aware than before of different language and cultural groups among refugees.

Welfare disincentives. The dynamics of welfare disincentives in keeping the Hmong of Orange County out of the workforce are complex and are discussed in greater detail below. Despite welfare disincentives, there are many examples of individuals whose determination to work outweighs the consideration that they might bring home more money on welfare. A 55-year-old man who makes $700 a month, whose rent is $600 a month and who would receive $920 cash in welfare, refuses to give up work:

> My mind is different. I want to be able to support my family in the future. I have hung on to my job even without welfare supplementation because I know welfare without work leads nowhere.

Successful experiences in the workplace. Those Hmong in Orange County able to obtain and retain jobs experience success in their jobs. Employers are pleased with Hmong attendance, attitudes toward work and quality of work. The Los Angeles Times' article referenced above notes that despite some problems in communication (both in terms of language and culture), employers in Orange County regard refugees highly as employees. An employer of nine Hmong (out of 25 workers) in a high technology company told us that the company has been pleased with the Hmong employees, noting that they were quiet and hard-working. "We rely on their good attitude," he said. The working Hmong we interviewed have received steady if small pay increments and many receive vacations and benefits now. A 28-year-old man with four children who receives $6.08 an hour reported he is very happy with his job because his wages have increased so fast. He goes to night school and plans to eventually get a two-year degree in electronics technology to obtain an even better job. He and the few others like him are optimistic about their future in Orange County.

Welfare Dependence

In Orange County, welfare dependence and self-sufficiency are closely linked to the cost of living, to employment opportunities and to welfare regulations. Welfare is considered by the Hmong community of Orange County as short-term aid until self-sufficiency can be reached, rather than a long-term support system.

Unfortunately, prior to January 1983, Orange County DSS records for AFDC, AFDC-U and RCA do not distinguish Hmong from other clientele who came from Laos. GR records are even more problematic: they do not break out caseload statistics by country of origin or ethnic group, only by "refugee." These problems, plus the varying estimates of the Hmong population in Orange County, make it difficult to estimate accurately numbers or percentages of Hmong households who have been dependent on welfare over time. Thus, using other tracking studies, current statistics, and the experiences of Hmong bilingual and other welfare staff, a general picture of the pattern of Hmong welfare dependence in Orange County can be pieced together.

The IRPC survey referenced above taken in June 1981 found that 64% of all refugees in Orange County were living in households who received some kind of welfare aid. For the Hmong, 89% lived in households that received some kind of cash public assistance, 81% in households receiving food stamps, 14% in households receiving some SSI and 89% in households receiving medical aid. At that time, according to the same survey, 48% of refugees paid $350-$400 a month in rent--the low end of county rental rates.

Hmong leaders' estimates for the early years of Hmong in Orange County agree with the survey's 89% figure of the number of Hmong living in households who received <u>some</u> welfare assistance. That 89% of the households received

public assistance does not mean that they received the maximum amount, that everyone in the household received assistance, or that they were not working. According to welfare workers and Hmong informants, when the economy was better and aid regulations different, a substantial number of households had both some employment income and some welfare supplementation. Families were working and progressively becoming self-sufficient.

The downturn in the local economy and the change in aid regulations happened at about the same time. After Spring 1982, Hmong who were receiving RCA could no longer exclude $30 plus one-third of their income from their grant determination. Current estimates concur that the percentage of Hmong families who receive some public assistance is still around 85%, but these families are more likely to be on full assistance than before cut-offs of supplementation. In January 1983, there were 292 Hmong AFDC, AFDC-U and RCA cases, and in February there were 280 cases.[6] Hmong welfare eligibility workers note that more people on their caseloads are reapplying for welfare and more people are also leaving for other counties, so the caseload figure may appear deceptively constant. Workers also say that fewer Hmong on their caseloads are working than before, and that they see more people leaving jobs and going on welfare to make ends meet--since welfare may pay more than minimum wage jobs. As the cost of living rises, families often have no alternative but to give up their small but steady gains in experience and wages to provide necessities and medical care for their children. A Hmong welfare worker told us:

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[6]Caseload figures before January 1982 are not available for Hmong only, since they were grouped together with others of Lao nationality.

> Due to language problems, Hmong get very low pay. Many get laid off. About a year ago, due to RCA changes in regulations, a lot of people came back on welfare. With 100 hours maximum to work and still get welfare, people just can't survive. Due to cuts, I just don't see people getting jobs. Before the change, a lot of people got a job and then got a supplement. Since the change and the 100-hour regulation, if they have a big family, no matter what salary they get, they can't make it. It is very bad for big families. Not too many people stay on the job very long. They go around and around in the welfare system.

In October 1981, the Orange County Department of Social Services conducted a self-sufficiency study of refugee adults who had applied for aid initially in July and August 1979. The study profiles those refugees in Orange County who were most likely to become self-sufficient during that time and those least likely. Of those who became self-sufficient, 48% were single adults, 41% were fathers, 7% mothers and 4% children 16-21. Of those who had not become self-sufficient, 14% were single adults, 62% fathers, 20% mothers. The most likely of the group to become self-sufficient were single adults, the least likely were mothers and fathers.

Households who stayed on welfare longer had larger families and less English proficiency. There were no self-sufficient refugees in this study who had eight or nine children. Families headed by mothers and those with over five children were shown as especially vulnerable to long-term dependence. Ninety-five percent of those who had become self-sufficient after the two years were literate, whereas only 7.9% of those who were not self-sufficient were literate.

These profiles of dependence correspond closely to a fairly representative profile of Hmong household heads in Orange County: They have large families (87% have more than five members), are parents and have limited education and literacy skills. As will be discussed in more detail in the following section, for Hmong in Orange County who contend with low-paying jobs, layoffs,

limitations to work hours while receiving assistance and very high housing costs and large families, staying off welfare is a monumental struggle. The Bureau of Labor statistics estimated that in 1981, a yearly income of $16,618 would support a family of four at a low standard of living. A Hmong family of four, smaller than average, supported by one wage earner with a fairly typical $5.00 an hour job, would gross $10,000 a year, over a third less than the amount needed to support the family at a "low standard of living." As a Hmong welfare worker put it: "I don't know, it seems we are going backward instead of ahead."

Hmong Attitudes Toward Welfare and Self-Sufficiency in Orange County

An underlying attitude about public assistance emerged from the group meetings and discussions with leaders and individuals. Welfare is viewed as necessary for particular needy populations, such as widows, orphans, old and disabled people, and for those who cannot find work. It is seen as temporary support from the government, part of an obligation Hmong perceive Americans have towards Hmong who had to leave Laos after fighting with Americans in the war. A woman head of household told us that welfare is the only resource separated or widowed mothers may have:

> Welfare is an excellent assistance for my family and others who have the same problem like me. Without this help, my family would not survive. I have no reason to complain about this system, because we are at the end of a dead end street.

Most Hmong do not want to rely on welfare forever; they see welfare as something to help them become self-sufficient. But they see many factors as working against self-sufficiency and wonder what will happen in the future. Changes in welfare policies over the years have been problematic, causing confusion and heightening Hmong insecurity, as well as serving as disincentives to self-sufficiency. An Orange County refugee worker told us:

> In between 1979 and 1980 the Refugee Bill did not get reviewed and people were temporarily cut off. They got back on aid, but a fear was set up in the refugee community. They got locked into a welfare system that everyone recognized was terrible.

A young Hmong working and no longer receiving aid explained:

> The welfare system is good, temporarily. Since I came to the USA I have stayed on welfare only five months. As I can see it, the welfare system is always changing, so it creates a lot of problems for people. For example, sometimes welfare still helps a person while they are working, later welfare does not so working people quit and later welfare requires them to find a job again. It plays like a circle again and again.

Welfare as a Disincentive to Work

A prime issue in both short-term and long-term dependence on public assistance in Orange County is that there are major disincentives to work and education for Hmong families on welfare. These disincentives are particularly strong for large families and grow as the cost of living increases in Orange County, full-time jobs at good wages continue to be difficult to obtain, and welfare regulations remain the same.

The Hmong in Orange County are acutely aware of the double bind they are placed in by the present assistance structure: If they want to start work gradually and build up experience and skills to obtain better jobs and wages so that their families will no longer have to depend on public assistance and if they work over 100 hours per month, they must often live on less money than welfare payments, often not even enough to meet rent and basic expenses. In addition, without MediCal those working at minimum wages risk not having sufficient health care for their children, something very few parents are willing to do.

Hmong individuals and leaders repeatedly lamented the high odds against escaping dependence. They see an incipient welfare dependence cycle developing that needs to be aborted now. Many expressed a willingness

to work for any amount if they could be assured of medical insurance until they could afford it on their own. Others simply cannot make ends meet with minimum wage jobs and large families, and feel they must return to welfare. There is simply too much risk and too much financial disincentive to get away from welfare. The disincentives to work are particularly vexing to the Hmong of Orange County--the great majority of whom would prefer work over welfare. One told us: "It seems the welfare system is designed to keep us down." In recent months, the Orange County Department of Social Services has held workshops to help families leave welfare dependence in steps: the strategy is to have the person who is not registered as the primary wage earner (usually a woman) work, and the primary wage earner work less than 100 hours per month, until enough security, income and possibly medical benefits can be built up before going off welfare. So far, a DSS administrator told us, the seminars do not seem to be successful, possibly because they involve a very complicated family budget and management system.

The dynamics of work disincentives are summed up in the following short account, related by a highly motivated Hmong man. This 45-year-old man's welfare and work experience are a good example of how the interrelationships between welfare regulations, low wages and high rent in Orange County make permanent self-sufficiency so difficult even for Hmong who have experience and marketable skills:

> Now I am not working, and stay on welfare for full assistance. I receive $601 cash and $98 food stamps and full medical coverage for my family of four people. I used to work for Islander Yacht Company as a boat painter right after my six months ESL and three months vocational training as a woodworker. I worked for this company for two-and-a-half years. I started at $3.15 an hour and by the time I left I was getting $4.50 and earned about $604 net pay per month. However, at that time I still received medical coverage and food stamps while working. The welfare regulations required that if I worked more than 100 hours a month, I would not be eligible to

receive any assistance at all. My welfare worker gave me the advice that if I wanted to continue medical insurance, I should quit my job. Of course, because I cannot afford weekly doctor bills, I quit the job and applied for the whole thing again.

My employer was sad to lose me. He said I'm the best employee in the company. He told me that whenever I want to go back to work then just let him know. He welcomes me at any time. I cannot go back to work, though, because rent is too high. Everything's increasing, including medical care and utilities. I have already figured out that the income does not cover my daily expenses.

As I can see, the welfare system is not a program designed to offer the opportunity for people to become self-supporting. At least welfare should help to pay the difference of the average family's monthly expenses, so the working person has a chance to hold his job longer until his wage increases enough to support his family. For example, if welfare could have helped me with medical coverage, I think my income would have increased enough by now to cover medical insurance and maybe I would no longer have to depend on welfare.

If welfare would help me with medical care, then I would rather go back to work and get some more experience than go to school. In the future, I want to work as a carpenter because it is related to the experience I had in Laos so it would be easier for me to improve as a professional. To look for this job, I will go to the local agency for job referral, or go to EDD for job search. I will look for a permanent job, with good pay, so I will never have to go back on welfare again.

Welfare as a Disincentive to Education

For Hmong youth and adolescents who arrived in this country two or three years ago, without any previous education, catching up to the educational level of their American peers often takes them past their 18th birthday. If their families are on public assistance, the families are faced with severe financial burdens if these students wish to remain in school until they graduate. This is of grave concern to Hmong parents.

Under present assistance structures, if a student is part of a family's AFDC grant, turns 18, and will not graduate by his or her 19th birthday, he or she will be cut from the grant. Normally, any needy person in Orange County

can apply for GR assistance, and 18-year-olds can receive GR, but only if they are "employable," that is, not in school and available for work, because of the strict work program and work search provision of GR. To finish high school, young people must live with their families or relatives, adding another expense to an already marginal welfare budget. War orphans who have been living with other families are especially reluctant to place this much of a burden on their relatives. For all the young people, resources with which to buy school supplies and books are extremely scarce. Many drop out of school to look for work and, ironically enough, eventually apply for assistance because without adequate education, they have great difficulty finding jobs. A bilingual aide in a Santa Ana school estimates that of those students whose AFDC aid is terminated while they are still in school, 90% do not graduate.

Both parents and elders, who look to youth for their future support, see the lack of financial assistance to finish high school as one of the most egregious and far reaching problems of the new generation of Hmong. One young Hmong man predicted:

> In the next five or ten years, I think the number of Hmong on welfare will increase. For example, I have four friends in the same generation as me. We went to the same high school and four of them dropped out. Now each of them has three or four children already. They get assistance from welfare. They cannot write a form, they cannot fill out an application, and they are in the same situation as old people.

Effects of Welfare Dependence on Family Structures

Even in the short time since Hmong have come to this country, effects of welfare dependence on the family structure have been felt in Orange County. One elder complained that the "welfare system is breaking up traditional family structures." One example of this includes young people who turn 18 and

no longer are part of the AFDC grant, but cannot yet work to help support their parents and must therefore either leave the household or, if they stay, become afraid to let anyone know they are living there. A middle-aged man related to us that his daughter got married "just to help out the family," which could not afford basic expenses.

Welfare workers related several incidents of men deserting their families, counter to traditional values, because they felt that if they left, at least their wives and children would be taken care of. "These men disappear," an eligibility worker said, " and are never heard from again."

Need for Information

Because of the changing and often complex regulations of the California and Orange County welfare systems, there is need for more information on aid and services available to Hmong. Some of the fears and rumors, rooted in misinformation, prevent people from getting work, services or medical care they need.

For example, we were told by several young people over 18 who were still living at home that they were afraid to fill out any forms or job applications that required them to give their address, because they thought that if welfare found out they were living with their parents, the family grant would be reduced further for rent the children were supposed to be paying. Orange County DSS staff state that these fears are unfounded, as grant amounts have already been cut for the 18-year-olds and would not be cut further, though ten percent of any rent the young people paid would be considered "income" for the families.

Since January 1983, persons receiving GR in Orange County no longer are mailed a medical card. GR recipients now are served through the County

Indigent Medical program, and persons must apply for it when they receive medical services at hospitals. Medical care is now more limited than when GR recipients had medical cards, but there is assistance available for serious illnesses. Almost all the older Hmong we talked to perceived loss of medical cards as loss of medical care. Clearly, better information is needed.

Special Populations at Risk

From the group meetings and interviews, special populations particularly those at risk for continued welfare dependence and social adjustment problems were identified:

1. Women. Of 30 women who attended the women's meeting, 10 had been widowed or separated from their husbands. Most of these women had children, but few had literacy skills or education. Most (of these women) are dependent on AFDC grants, which will terminate when their children reach 18. They have no work experience and few job skills because of their child care responsibilities. They are increasingly desperate, because as their children reach 18 and cannot find jobs, there is no money to support them in school. Below are two comments typical of the many which emerged from the women's meeting:

> When we lived in our country we had many children. We knew how to do many things to support ourselves. Here everything is just money. We're always thinking about welfare, how can we support ourselves after it runs out.

> I have never received any kind of job training in my life. What I did a long time ago was helping my parents in the field. After I married my husband, he joined the army and held a good position so we had enough income to support the family, so I didn't do anything after.

Women in intact families also feel financial pressure to go to work to contribute to family support. Childcare responsibilities and language problems remain barriers to women working. One employer of Hmong, who is very pleased with the quality of work the eight Hmong women in his factory produce, said that the main reason he loses Hmong employees is pregnancy. The following short account of a woman single head of household, now receiving AFDC, tells of the situation she faces:

> When my husband and I came to this country, we had two children with us. At the beginning of our resettlement in this country, my husband wanted me to take care of the children, so he had a chance to go to school. Due to our culture, the wife had no power in the household to make a decision of what should be done. After three years of our resettlement, I had three more children, and also was pregnant with a fourth. I stayed home all the time to take care of these young children. When my husband was still going to school, we were on welfare. But when he received enough education, then he separated himself from me and the children. He said he could not support a big family. He complained that I was useless to him, because I was illiterate, but in fact he married me too young and didn't give me a chance to go to school. Finally he left home. I decided to move to Santa Ana where I could get some help. Now I have a large family, the oldest child is under 12 and the youngest a baby. For me it is almost impossible to maintain a life, because I cannot drive, read or speak English. I decided many times to commit suicide, but I love my children very much.
>
> In the future after my children know enough to take care of themselves, I will get into whatever job that I meet the qualifications. I will get help from the people in my church or the community agency. I belong to an American church, so they love, care and are helpful to my family. They said that they will help me get a job.

2. Older adults. Older adults without children are aided either by GR in Orange County or by SSI, if they are 65. In Laos, people of 55 would be retired; here they may be expected to look for work. They are subject to depression, homesickness, and feelings of worthlessness. Those older people living on GR who do not have children and live with other families often

subsist at minimal levels and feel they are a burden to the families that have taken them in. One 50-year-old expressed her desperation:

> Now I am 50. I receive $20 cash and $50 to buy food. I don't have enough to support myself and I have a hard time staying in the U.S. How can I stay in this country? I feel bad, there is no one to support me.

A 65-year-old man related:

> I feel shame, because we came to eat others' [taxpayers'] belongings. Sometimes they love and care, but sometimes they hate and put us down. Of course, the standard of living in this country is many times better than in Laos, but in order to have a happy life, we must be able to cope with the problems we have. For me, life here is more difficult than fighting in the battlefield.

Job Training

Hmong in Orange County often identify job training as an important goal. Hmong leaders and welfare workers interviewed estimate that somewhere between 15-30% of Hmong in Orange County have received job training. For women, the percentage is much lower. Two main issues emerge in discussing job training. The first is availability of appropriate training for Hmong and the second is placement after training.

Although community colleges in Orange County offer a number of vocational courses and programs such as CETA are heavily used by refugees, many programs require English and literacy skills beyond the level of most Hmong adults, particularly older adults. The Orange County (1982) Plan for Refugee Resettlement notes:

> . . . County Social Services data shows 72% [of refugees] referred for employment wanted training before entering the workforce. As few specialized training opportunities existed, refugees have assertively accessed Manpower (CETA) programs. (Manpower staff report that refugees comprise 29% of their applicants). . ..

> Refugees with poor English skills were often rejected from CETA slots. Lao Family and Lao Ethnic Association instituted specialized training opportunities for these refugees who were either rejected or unsuccessful in regular classes. Many of these have been successfully placed in jobs although their English skill remains below the level required by most training programs. (page 29)

Other than the electronics program described below, there are virtually no training programs in Orange County which Hmong with little education can take advantage of. The Lao Family electronics assembly training, although it is taught in English and serves other refugees besides Hmong, uses an approach which is appropriate to Hmong participants. A job trainer at this program notes that the step-by-step approach, using lots of repetition and hands-on training, appears to be successful for Hmong trainees. Comments made in group meetings indicate that Hmong feel that six months ESL is not enough to qualify them for most training programs. They believe that more bilingual training in particular skills would be very useful.

The Hmong are confident in their ability to learn fast by doing. One man said, "I can do anything if you just show me once. Hmong people are skillful. Just <u>show</u> them the job and they will pick it up." A childcare worker with no previous education or literacy related with evident pride the alacrity with which she and her Hmong co-workers learned their work on the job:

> I work in a child care center. To be a child care worker, you must have a certain degree from school, but there are four Hmong women working there too as child care aides and they do the same things and work at the same level. They just showed us one time and we could do everything.

General weaknesses in job training for Hmong are in placement after training and training people for non-available jobs. One welfare worker interviewed estimated that about 80% of those trained have secured jobs after training, but the other Hmong informants believe that less than 15% obtained work related to the job training. Of the seven working individuals

interviewed, only two had previous training which was related to their jobs, one in woodworking and the other in electronics. The others received on-the-job training.

Additionally, available training programs do not always conform to the labor market. For example the furniture making and upholstery class offered at the training center at Lao Family was very popular with Hmong men, but few found jobs after training. In other cases, trainees have finished job training without job-search skills, or more recently, finish training at a time when hiring is down.

That Hmong continue to need guidance in gaining access to and choosing appropriate job training was brought home poignantly during an interview with a 55-year-old man. He is going to school at night, he said, receiving "job training." When asked what kind of job training he was receiving, he proudly pointed to a few black and white photographs on the wall that he took in an adult school photography class.

Education

Orange County has a relatively highly educated general population: According to 1980 Census data, there were more high school graduates residing in Orange County than in any other SMSA in California. Hmong children and adolescents attend the regular public schools throughout Orange County. Because they are often grouped with ethnic Lao in school figures, it is difficult to get precise attendance figures for Hmong children at the various schools.

The factors determining the quality and quantity of education Hmong young people receive are complex. They are closely interwoven with issues of dependence and self-sufficiency, secondary migration patterns, language and educational background of parents, and cultural and language differences between Hmong and American children attending Orange County schools.

How Hmong Are Doing in School

A bilingual aide summed up the question of how Hmong children are doing in school by saying that by the time students get to junior high, there are two basic groups. The first group are those who received basic education and learned English in elementary school. These students are doing as well as others in the school, he says, and have no special problems. The second group are those whose families arrived more recently, one or two years ago, and have never before had any education. This group is placed in grades by age level.[7] The latter group, though smaller than the first, experiences considerable difficulty and is far behind the other students.

Another Hmong bilingual aide noted that though many Hmong students have a language disadvantage, they are learning fast. An American high school teacher who works closely with Hmong students, however, observes that many Hmong students are not doing as well as other non-native speakers in the school. Their reading scores are generally lower, and they do not do as well on standardized exams. He attributes these problems to both reading deficiencies and cultural differences.

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[7]Policies vary, but age is usually used for placement. Some high school students with no previous education are placed at freshman level regardless of age.

Teachers note that Hmong students do well in art classes and in organizing activities. They also do well in sports, especially soccer, but give priorities to their studies and often do not have time for extracurricular sports or activities.

Parental Perceptions and Role in Education

Parents we talked with at group meetings and as individuals all perceived their children are doing well in school. Several complained of not being able to afford books or school clothes for the children, and as previously mentioned, almost all are greatly concerned about young people who reach the age of 18 and have not yet graduated from high school, but no longer are part of an AFDC grant and often leave school to try to support themselves. Many Hmong parents value education highly and see it as a passport for their children's success in this country and often as the last resource to ensure their own security in old age. As one woman told us:

> We just depend on our children, because now our children are still young, and we are old. The best way is to write the government for more money for children to go to school, then the children can help mother and father in future life.

Hmong students in Orange County who have gone on to college cite parental support as an important factor in their decision to continue their education. Still, Hmong school aides and social service workers mention problems experienced by children of the poorest, least educated Hmong parents who are unfamiliar and confused by American school systems. Hmong aides and teachers feel these are the children who are likely to be most disinterested in school and eventually drop out. A Hmong welfare worker described the problems in communication between generations regarding schooling:

> The parents and children are not talking to each other. The parents don't know what is going on in school. They never had any experience with things like PTA. The kids receive one message in school and another at home. They can't live with their dual personalities. The problem is very complicated.

Hmong leaders and students agreed that parents need better information on the American educational system and how they can participate.

Bilingual Education and Language Instruction

Hmong leaders and educators in Orange County brought up the issue of bilingual education for their children. They voice opposing views on the value of bilingual education; those opposed to bilingual education are adamantly against taking up the time of small children with classes in the Hmong language, when in their view the children could learn English better and be more competitive if they were simply placed in classes with English-speaking children. However, most of the Hmong informants, bilingual aides, Hmong students and American high school teachers we talked to believe that for certain groups of Hmong children and for certain classroom subjects, bilingual instruction or at least bilingual aides in some classrooms are needed. The children who need this help the most are those young children who have spoken only Hmong at home and need help for a short time, and those students who are 14-15 years old and have very little previous educational experience or English skills.

One American high school teacher is starting a Hmong literacy program for Hmong without literacy skills. A Hmong bilingual aide at a junior high school also has set up after-school special Hmong and Lao bilingual classes for students who need help. He outlined what he feels to be the benefits of bilingual instruction:

> I proposed a bilingual program at the beginning of last semester and it was approved by the school to teach bilingual education to the kids, but the school offered only 30 minutes a day and no credit for students. However, kids are doing well and learn how to read and write faster. I think if the school could have this bilingual class on the regular schedule, and have the student learn it for credit, then it would be useful because it would be easier for them to learn new things if they are literate in their own language.

In other schools, Hmong students don't receive any special help, apart from the regular ESL program.

Orange County schools offer ESL to students. One ESL teacher felt that the emphasis in the ESL classes in high school to pass the statewide written California English competency exams has an effect on the ESL program, giving too much priority to written skills and pre-empting spoken language development. In a meeting with ten Hmong high school students, many said that English was their favorite topic and that their ESL teachers were the only teachers who gave them special attention. Another, who finished high school last year and was the only Hmong in his school, thought ESL kept students back and that placement in ESL made some feel inadequate:

> ESL class is just not that different. You learn the same things year after year. Some kids think that if they are in ESL they are not that good. If you teach the easiest things, they'll learn easier things. If you teach harder things, they'll learn harder things.

School Dropouts

Dropping out of high school is considered by the Hmong to be one of the difficult problems they face in Orange County. Though estimates vary, it is clear that a large proportion of Hmong students who have attended Orange County junior high and high schools have dropped out before graduation. Hmong students have relocated frequently, and it is difficult for schools, their

teachers and peers to know for certain how many students who leave have dropped out of school and how many have moved.

There is a consensus among high school students, teachers and Hmong leaders that between 80-90% of Hmong girls drop out of school before they graduate. One Hmong bilingual aide estimated that 75% of the boys drop out before graduation, another estimated that 60% dropped out before graduation. Hmong high school and college students, however, estimate that 15-20% of their Hmong high school friends did not finish. Students, Hmong school aides, parents and leaders agree on the factors which contribute to dropping out: cutoffs in public assistance (mentioned above), early marriage, difficulty or frustration with school, and moving from place to place. Whatever the reasons for leaving school, these young dropouts often do not have the skills to fill out an application for a job, or the English to get through a job interview.

Early marriage. The traditional Hmong pattern of early marriage persists in Orange County, despite efforts on the part of some leaders and church groups to discourage it, and has not fitted in well with the American school system. Marriage and pregnancy are the primary reasons girls drop out of school, many even before reaching high school. Birth control classes are not offered until junior or senior year in many schools. It is also a factor for boys, particularly if they have children. With large families and inadequate education or skills, these young families may be forming a new generation of welfare-dependent households. Some Hmong college students described the cycle:

> The girls still feel like if they are not married by eighteen, they won't get married at all. At first, when the kids get married, they are happy and think everything will be all right. Then they find out they can't get jobs and have children and need welfare again.

Although the pattern of young marriages persists, young people feel attitudes may be changing slowly. Some youth are postponing marriage to further their education. For the rest, who are more uncertain of their futures, the traditional marriage and family pattern provides a known way to structure their lives.

One Hmong church group is actively encouraging parents to deny their children the written permission necessary in California to marry under 18. Lao Family has offered marriage counseling for young couples, but these efforts have not yet had a great impact on early marriage.

Guidance needs and academic difficulties in school. Lack of guidance or direction in school and academic problems contribute to Hmong student frustration and dropping out of school. Hmong school aides say that migration patterns also make it hard for young people to continue in school.

Hmong school aides and students propose several initiatives which might encourage Hmong high school students to stay in school. Hmong students and their teachers agree that general and career counseling are badly needed for these adolescents, who are unfamiliar with American educational and employment systems. At a meeting of college students, some Hmong high school graduates told us their ideas of counseling:

> They need guidance in high school to tell them that education is the most important thing. The problem is we come from a very underdeveloped country. We never saw that there could be such wonderful things--computers and like that. Kids need advice in high school.

> Just try to make the kids see that going to school isn't something tedious, because that's the way I used to see it. Make them see it's like fun. After I changed my attitudes I learned more--I'm really a lot more open-minded now. I think that most kids see school as something that's forced on them. I think that most kids don't like that.

Bilingual instruction in content areas might also help students pass competency exams. A Hmong aide suggested that Big Brother and Big Sister programs would be useful to the younger students, because uneducated parents often do not encourage or help students to study at home. The Big Brother or Sister could also provide guidance about American school systems.

Financial needs. The most pressing need for older high school students is continued financial support through high school. Though exact numbers could not be ascertained, a knowledgeable Hmong leader estimated that about one high school student in every three or four families has had his or her AFDC aid terminated. At group meetings, parents pleaded for scholarships or extension of public assistance so that their children could complete high school. One woman said:

> We are old, and we cannot learn. We only depend on our children to help us. Please tell the government that they must help our children get an education.

Another elder admonished, "Don't forget the younger generation. They are our future."

Higher Education

The Orange County area has many two-year community colleges, private colleges and four-year state universities. Hmong college students interviewed estimated that there are about 20 to 25 full-time Hmong students presently attending college. They also stated there are many more part-time students, but their numbers are harder to ascertain.

The full-time Hmong students from Orange County attending various institutions are estimated to be:

Total Students

Orange County College	3
Santa Ana College	3-4
Golden West College	5
California State, Fullerton	8
University of California, Irvine	2
California State, Long Beach	4

These students are mostly young men but several young women are also attending college. Two students have recently graduated from California State, Fullerton, both in the social sciences. Students are studying a variety of subjects: engineering, biochemistry, linguistics, accounting, social sciences and computer science among others. The numbers of full-time students in college indicate that in the next several years, a core of 15-25 or more locally educated graduates will be entering the labor force.

The Hmong students who attend college are well aware of their elite status and the sacrifices required by their families to support them while they are in college. Since tuition at local state colleges is modest, and community colleges are virtually free, most students use Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG) for tuition and live with their families, depending on them for extra expenses. Some work in the summer or take out loans. Current students say that they cannot get state-wide scholarships because even if their grades are good and they study hard, most Hmong students have not yet reached the subject matter and English achievement levels to compete with American students. A recent college graduate's description of his decision to go to college exemplifies the students' commitment and feelings of responsibility to the community:

> I looked at my family background and our living standard and it seemed to me that without education we won't be able to survive. There are a total of ten people in my family. I am the oldest son and I feel responsible to care for the younger family. I have the idea that without higher education, I won't be able to help my family, so no matter how hard it is for me, I

> will struggle and fight, that's why I take out loans. Not only for my family, but also my whole community. In order for you to solve all those problems, you need education.

Hmong college students in Orange County have already shared the benefits of their education with the community. For example, they have given well attended seminars and lectures at the mutual assistance organization in Hmong on the American system of government and economics. They note that the older, less educated Hmong adults want and need more information about these topics. The college students have also formed a community service organization, the Lao Student Association.

The Lao Student Association

The Lao Student Association (LSA) was formed in 1979 at California State University, Fullerton, by a group of Hmong students. It is a volunteer organization of Hmong students doing different kinds of community work, and targets assistance to young Hmong, particularly those with educational problems. The philosophy of the group is that young people will soon be responsible for supporting the community, and if they are aimed in the right direction, many of the problems besetting the Hmong currently might be relieved in the future.

The LSA Information Sheet states:

> The objective is to bridge the gap between the Third World people who recently came to this modern and technological society, especially the Laotian youth and community. We hope that the youth emphasis will have spillover effects that should improve assistance to the community as a whole, because the young people can learn and understand the transitions quicker than their parents.

Special features. The significance of LSA as an adjustment strategy is its youth focus, its future orientation and its sharing of higher education which up to now has only been available to a few privileged young people. It

is Hmong young people trying to help out Hmong young people. LSA works primarily out of the headquarters of the Lao Family Community in Santa Ana. In addition to social activities, some of the successful service activities they have undertaken include:

1. Ongoing tutoring for young people in math and English three days a week from 5-7 p.m.

2. Ongoing counseling, referral and help in translation for young people.

3. Workshop presentations to adult participants in ESL classes on Friday afternoons about American economic systems, government and social problems. These were presented in Hmong, step-by-step, and presenters feel they were very popular and successful.

4. One LSA committee cooperated with the Orange County schools to help figure out equivalent levels in Laos, so that students who were 18 or 19 automatically placed in the senior class, could get credit for some of their previous work, and be able to graduate from high school.

In addition, LSA, which is a registered California non-profit organization, has given its young members an opportunity to practice running an organization, writing by-laws, and so on.

Adult ESL

One of the major resettlement problems for the Hmong in Orange County is the lack of English. In spite of many individual successes in learning English in a very short time, the community as a whole sees inadequacy of skills in English as an overwhelming problem. English is perceived as necessary for entry into jobs, for promotion on the job, for making use of job training, for higher education and for acceptance by the American community. Difficulty in learning English has become a metaphor for difficulties in every aspect of the Hmong's new life in America.

English language training is offered by adult school programs and community colleges throughout Orange County. Until last year, Lao Family Community also offered English language training which had been specially designed for the needs of the Hmong. When the Hmong began arriving in Orange County in large numbers in 1979, local programs were already offering English language training for many different nationalities. However, when the Hmong first arrived, they did not fit into the existing refugee ESL programs, which were primarily designed for the Vietnamese who have historically formed the largest segment of the refugee population in the area. According to one refugee resettlement worker, very little ESL was offered from 1977-1979 that was accessible to people with limited literacy and previous education, such as the Hmong.

Lao Family Community developed classes which used an approach designed particularly for Hmong students. Students attended classes 20 hours a week, for six-week sessions. The program used bilingual teachers and native English speakers together and included basic literacy training and beginning classes. Although the program was never very large, Hmong individuals we talked with were pleased with this program and were particularly enthusiastic about the bilingual approach for beginning students.

Program Participation

The majority of Hmong adults in Orange County have attended some kind of English language training classes since their arrival in the United States. In 1981 (the peak year of Hmong population in Orange County) the IRPC survey found that 73% of the Hmong were enrolled in English language or other classroom training at that time compared with 74% of Cambodians, 57% of Lao and 51% of Vietnamese. The same study showed that though 93% of the Hmong had

less than a high school education before coming to this country, 86% of the Hmong residing in Orange County had attended some type of class since their arrival here.

The Hmong attend several different programs in the area, based both on the type of program and its location. Lao Family lost its bid to continue offering ESL in 1982. Students who previously attended classes at Lao Family are reportedly now going to various adult school programs in the area, with more advanced students attending community colleges. Based on reports of Hmong adults in group meetings and individual interviews, many of the less literate students who had been attending the Lao Family program feel they have nowhere to go to learn English now.

Perceptions of Programs and Instruction

Although the fact that the majority of Hmong in Orange County have attended ESL classes indicates a felt need for formal instruction, there is a widespread feeling that instruction in local programs does not fit the language needs of the Hmong in Orange County. In 1979, to alleviate the burden of very large numbers of refugees then entering programs, the county instituted a six-month time limitation on participation in any given refugee ESL program. This policy is seen as unrealistic for Hmong students. "They just get started," a Hmong welfare worker told us, "and then they get sent away."

Another major complaint is that class content is often irrelevant to specific English needs, particularly job-related English. A man in his 50's explained:

> English for a job and for daily living are different. For people my age, English is very boring, as is staying on welfare. Just learning "table," "chair," etc., is boring and people are not motivated. We need to learn about applying for work, types of companies, and how to fill out an application.

A third area of concern is that of instructional approaches used in class. Hmong students have suggested that some bilingual instruction, particularly at lower levels, would be extremely helpful to them. Clan leaders at a group meeting said that with the bilingual approach used in the former Lao Family program, people really did learn. These men also believe classes for Hmong would be more successful if they used a more concrete, object-oriented approach to ESL such as learning to do specific tasks using English, rather than the abstract, literate approach common to most English language training programs. This opinion is shared by many professional ESL teachers who have worked extensively with Hmong.

Hmong also feel that a very structured step-by-step approach is necessary for their continued progress in learning in class. There is a perception that classes now available are too loosely structured.

The Context of English Acquisition

English language class is not the only way Hmong learn English. Previous educational and life experiences Hmong bring with them to the U.S., as well as their current resettlement experiences, influence language learning. However, several factors unrelated to classroom participation hinder Hmong from learning English as quickly or as well as they would like. For example, Hmong individuals cite lack of literacy skills and previous education, financial and emotional problems related to the traumas of war, loss and resettlement, and inadequate opportunity to speak English "with Americans."

Nonliteracy has meant that many Hmong adults, particularly older adults, frequently have not been able to take full advantage of available English classes that often require literacy skills. Nonliterates say it takes them longer to learn English than students who can read and write, and that six months or a year is simply not enough time to learn. Individuals also recognize that there are alternative or additional strategies for learning English outside of class. Nonliterates cannot make use of the books or dictionaries that more educated Hmong say have been important tools for their continued acquisition. An older Hmong man described the community experience:

> The Hmong are a hill tribe people and they never had any education. The majority are illiterate. We have been here four or five years already and it's hard to learn English as quickly as you need to use it. Six months or a year is not enough time.

Financial worries, together with family responsibilities and problems, are additional barriers to learning English. For example, at a meeting of 30 women, many said they were too worried about their families to attend and learn at school. One said:

> If we are still young, we can learn, but if we are 40 or 50, then we can't learn because we have many children and family problems.

The women suggested that having classes in or near their homes, so that they could take care of the children, would be helpful to them.

Lack of contact with native English speakers is consistently identified as a problem in learning English. Hmong individuals and English teachers suggest improving contacts through friends, neighbors, church or work as ways of practicing English. They also suggest practicing with their own children. One woman with no previous education or literacy who has been particularly successful in acquiring English attributes her success to working with English

speaking people and living apart from the large clusters of Hmong in Orange County:

> Living here in Orange (County), nobody speaks Hmong, and I learn English. If I lived down there (in Santa Ana) with all the Hmong people, I would only speak Hmong and not learn English.

Another individual who had never been to any ESL program described an alternative learning strategy:

> Due to family problems, I never went to school. I learn to speak English in the church. I improve faster than those who learn in school, because the people at the church are very friendly. They know I can't speak English, so everyone wants to help. The best way to learn English is to be with friends, with American people and to talk English at home with the children and learn from the children.

Because many Hmong are hired in jobs in which English is not required, they do not necessarily use much English on the job (as in the case cited above of the man who worked four years and still spoke little English on the job), although there is consensus that they would like to be able to communicate better with their coworkers and bosses. People do learn the limited English necessary to perform their tasks on the job and some may widen their English speaking contacts as well. A Hmong assembly worker relates:

> An agency introduced me to my employer and told him that I had an English problem. I know that education is important in this country, but I don't plan to go on to study because my family faces difficult financial problems, and I can't learn and solve that problem at the same time. Assembly work is a good chance to learn to speak English, because I have to talk to other people, so I can improve my English in assembly work faster than those who learn from class. Learning to speak about what I do is easier than learning to remember in class.

As suggested in the sections above, interviews with individuals and group meetings suggest the ways Hmong in Orange County think English is best learned--a combination of instruction and social contact with native speakers. For those with limited literacy skills and previous education, very structured instruction--using books and based on actual language needs, with

some bilingual help at the lowest levels--is generally considered most effective. Almost all agree that frequent contact with native speakers, as friends or coworkers, is the best way to improve conversational skills. However, very few adult Hmong we talked with in Orange County appear to have frequent contact with American friends. One leader was skeptical about the value of English instruction without a real context in which to speak it:

> I have been here six years and I have seen the government spend a lot of money on ESL program, going to lots of different programs. I'm not sure if the programs can be improved; it's very hard for people to learn. If people don't find work, they don't use what English they have learned and forget everything they learn, it's a waste of money then. It might be better to put money into helping people find work.

It appears from interviews that those who enter jobs with some English skills or concurrent English training are the most likely to improve their English through contacts at work, while Hmong who enter the workforce with no English skills have a more difficult time learning English on the job.

IV

SIGNIFICANCE OF SITE: HIGHLIGHTS AND WHAT WAS LEARNED

Refugee Impact and the Hmong

A large factor in the outcome of Hmong resettlement in Orange County has been the large impact of Southeast Asian refugees in the area, combined with the fact that Hmong have represented only a small fraction--never more than 20%--of the refugee population. The large majority of refugees in Orange County are Vietnamese, many of whom have been in the United States since 1975. Both the fact that the Vietnamese were the first refugees to arrive in Orange County and the fact that the rural background and generally more limited educational experience of the Hmong created a greater adjustment problem for them contributed to Hmong being eclipsed by Vietnamese in the areas of social service delivery, employment placement and education training opportunities.

Orange County refugee workers note that during the initial arrival of Hmong to the area there simply were not enough social service staff to adequately serve applicants for services because of the significant refugee impact on the county. Additionally, because Hmong were proportionately a much smaller refugee group in the area, it took some time for their special needs to be recognized and for bilingual capability to be established in refugee services for Hmong. Now, though the Hmong are recognized by county social service providers as a distinct group with different needs, they are still far outnumbered by other groups. Hmong are often grouped together with Vietnamese in the public mind, most importantly by current or potential employers. The positive publicity as well as the backlash in public opinion of refugees due to their high visibility, perceived drain on social services, a downturn in

the economy and dwindling labor markets affect Hmong seeking training and employment in the area.

Precarious Self-Sufficiency

The interdependent factors that contribute to self-sufficiency or prevent Hmong from becoming self-sufficient can be seen in particularly sharp relief in Orange County. Even though Orange County is one of the wealthier areas of the nation, the experience of the Hmong in Orange County makes it evident that economic self-sufficiency is a precarious situation, since so many factors must work together to reach it. The job market has changed since Hmong first came to Orange County, making it currently much more difficult for Hmong to obtain jobs without English skills. High rents and large families make it hard to live on low wages, lack of English proficiency makes it hard to get high wages, and welfare regulations make it difficult to start out in part-time jobs. A lack of work experience makes it harder to get jobs and a bad economy means layoffs.

In Orange County, a change in any one of the elements affecting dependency or self-sufficiency affects all others. For the Hmong, at the margins of the economic system, small tremors in the economy can cause tidal waves in a minority community likely to be the first laid off and the last hired, even in an affluent region. Similarly, small changes in welfare payments or regulations can have a major impact on the Hmong community as a whole, which shares so many of its resources and depends so heavily on aid or supplementation. Because success in work is still marginal for the Hmong, they are easily bounced back and forth from "dependence" to "self-sufficiency." For Orange County, the self-sufficiency of the community has not yet been achieved, in spite of many individual successes who have broken out of the cycle of dependence.

The Future of Hmong Resettlement in Orange County

The Hmong settlement in Orange County is one of the oldest in the United States. In its short history, it has experienced growth through secondary migration and shrinkage through further migration. It has been through Southern California's economic boom and economic recession, changes in welfare and medical assistance policies, fluctuating public attitudes toward refugees and rampant rise in cost of living. The changing mood of Hmong in Orange County is a valuable perspective for viewing the dynamics of the Hmong resettlement process.

From about 1976-1980 or 1981, Orange County Hmong were hopeful. Orange County, with its beautiful climate, good schools and growing economy, seemed to offer infinite possibilities for successful resettlement. Although some Hmong have been successful, there is now, a few years later, a pervasive mood of hopelessness and inexplicably shattered dreams. In the years since initial resettlement, Hmong discovered that learning English was very difficult; that Americans in this country did not know them as well as the Americans they had encountered in Laos; and that jobs were hard to come by. The possibilities in Orange County now seem more limited and uncertain. Many people whose expectations had been raised by good jobs and supplementation from public assistance have been laid off and now welfare, it seems to them, is no longer designed to help them work. There is a sense of helplessness and victimization born out of these disappointments. As a 55-year-old man simply put it, "It seems someone is always controlling your life." An American resettlement worker who has been interested in the Hmong since their arrival observed:

> The Hmong in Orange County are not making it. There is a desperation. They are looking for help and there isn't any. Being able to live in your community is different than just a job. They thought they were coming to freedom, but is this freedom?

There have been different responses to the dashed expectations. Some families, still hoping to improve their lives, move to a different place to try again. Some see a future for their children or hope for jobs to become available, and they hang on in Orange County.

An important barometer of the mood in Orange County is the high percentage of adults that indicate they would like to return to Laos. At the group meetings we held, virtually all indicated that they want to return; some pleaded for help to go back. (It should be noted that the meetings of this study were attended almost exclusively by unemployed men. Others, according to the Director of Lao Family, do not come to meetings to discuss problems because they are tired and are doing all right. They do come to political and social functions, however.) Not all the Hmong feel as strongly as the men that attend these meetings, but leaders polled indicated that about 80% of the adults have a strong interest in going back to Laos. The high school students we talked to, themselves bright and optimistic, say their parents dream of returning to Laos. They said, "Because they have no education and they just stay home, that's the reason they want to go back to Laos. Every which way is blank for them so that's the only dream."

Even if they are physically cared for, a few people have no resources or hope left. One old woman told us, "I can't live here. There is no one to help me. I want to jump into the river and commit suicide, but there is no one to take me to the river." Some, especially the older generation, rekindle their hopes of returning to Laos. Orange County has lost about half of its Hmong to out-migration and people continue to move. Most of these families have gone to the Central Valley, where they hope to try again, many by farming. In Fresno there is a perceptibily different mood of hope. To move ahead, some look back--they plan to farm, like they did in Laos. Those who

have chosen to remain in Orange County either have succeeded in keeping stable jobs or have specific goals to reach for, such as their children's education, their own job training or the possibility of renewed employment. A few stay simply because they do not have resources to go elsewhere.

Improving Resettlement in Orange County--Leaders' Views

Leaders interviewed in this study voiced a variety of opinions as to how Hmong resettlement might be improved in Orange County. On two issues, however, they are unanimous: the importance of education, and the need for a resettlement strategy that is suited to Hmong background and needs. Leaders we spoke with noted that Hmong high school students must be encouraged to stay in school through counseling and financial incentives, and more Hmong students need to go on to college so that the community can have its group of American-trained professionals. A leader told us, "Leadership is lacking in economics, health, education--we need more education in these areas. Getting education is the only way we can really progress." A young student leader presented us with a clearly thought-out statement on the importance of education for the future of the Hmong in his community:

> My conclusion is that if we have education, if we have employment and we have capital, then we will know which direction to go. If the younger people get a higher education and scientific knowledge, they will know the problems with the community and if they have some money to start something, then they will know what to do because they will have the knowledge the same as Americans do.

Leaders also clearly said that any programs or strategies adopted with hopes of improving Hmong resettlement in Orange County must focus on the Hmong, not on other refugee groups, and not on the needs of service providers. As one leader told us, problems about money between funding sources and service providers often "leave refugees in the middle" with their

best interests not served. Another Hmong expressed the importance of Hmong participation in resettlement:

> A Hmong resettlement program has to be radical. They haven't fallen into the categories of any other previous groups. They are uneducated and unskilled. You have to do resettlement in the Hmong way and let it be done by them.

Many prominent Hmong, as well as other community members we talked to, feel that welfare reform is necessary in Orange County if Hmong are to become self-sufficient in the face of the high cost of living in the area. Several suggested that employment efforts, particularly involving a bilingual strategy, should be stepped up. Leaders are not especially optimistic about the chances of any such reform being implemented, but insist that a different welfare/work strategy is necessary to gain gradual self-sufficiency. Some suggest re-implementing welfare supplements for working families; others have a more radical viewpoint:

> Don't limit it to just a funding program. Don't tie down the funds and say, "You can't buy a house with this, you can't buy a house with that." The community says, "Give us a time limit and give us money. Treat us like adults. Let us know in advance what the time limit is and give us a start; we can pull together. Don't feed us month to month like this. We would like to see welfare not only be given but a factory built for us to work in--then we can have integrity and help the country, too."

Hmong leaders in Orange County are concerned about the effects of long-term dependence and unemployment, especially among middle-aged and older Hmong. They note that mental helth problems, including lack of self-esteem and depression, are becoming worse, even as the resources for dealing with them dwindle. Their fears were expressed by a young man who spoke up at a group meeting:

> I've had some education and speak English, yet me and my friends aren't really "successful" here, though we do manage to scratch out a day-to-day living. We will survive here, but the older people will never make it with all the problems they face. Their mental health is deteriorating, suicides occur, and they really should be able to go back and die in Laos where it's free (here they have to pay) and rejoin their ancestors.

Symptomatic of the distress of the middle-aged and older Hmong was the large number of persons coming to our group meeting who indicated that they would like to return to Laos. One student explained her parents' wish to return to Laos: "Because they have no education and they just stay home, that's the reason they want to go back to Laos. Every which way is blank for them so that's the only dream." The younger people do not cherish this hope and look more to their future in this country. Their hopes and aspirations are perhaps most instructive of the long-term direction of Hmong resettlement in Orange County.

The Future Generation--Views of Youth

In the general group meetings as well as the meetings held with high school and college students in the course of this study, the young Hmong emerged as genuinely concerned about their personal future and the future of their community. Many of them had thought out problems and proposed solutions which they thought most appropriate to their age group. A young man working as a bilingual aide outlined his analysis of the needs in Hmong resettlement. In his view, as well as that of many of the young people we talked with, there are different needs in different age groups:

> There are four groups of Hmong, each with their own needs:
>
> 1. The oldest people--what they need is to go back to Laos;
> 2. Middle-aged people without education--they need more education to do manual labor without reading;
> 3. Younger people need more education and vocational training;
> 4. Young children need a good education.

Like their elders, the youth tend to pin many of their hopes on education. The minority who have achieved higher education lament the fact that their friends and relatives are dropping out of school. Besides the reasons already mentioned for dropping out of school, the group of college students noted that preoccupation with the present, insufficient understanding of career or educational options, lack of future orientation and knowledge of how to plan their lives prevent many Hmong youth from succeeding in school and jobs. The group meetings revealed that even among the students who attended--all getting good grades and planning to graduate from high school--only a few had definite plans for careers or jobs. Career choices were varied: communications specialist, engineer, nurse, teacher, business.

These students also realized that education may be limited by traditional marriage and family patterns. This exchange between two students shows the hope of the Hmong youth as well as their appreciation of the problems they face:

> Student 1. I think the next generation, they're going to put their kids through school, they're going to see if you don't have education, you can't have anything here.
>
> Student 2. But what about if you don't have money, and you don't have education, and you have a lot of kids, how are you going to do that?

Like other American young people, they talked of going on to college, of getting married and raising families. There is a very strong sense of wanting to "belong" to the American community, combined with a sense of responsibility toward the Hmong community. Some of their comments included:

> I think the younger kids are really just about the same like the American kids; they don't remember that much about Laos. They want to be the same as American kids. They feel like they need to belong, and not feel separate.

> I think we have to see the Hmong community as the smaller community and the other one as the larger one. We have to be partners and belong because we can't survive if we just belong to our own group and are not involved with the other community.

The young Hmong straddle two cultures and experience the predictable conflicts of cultural change. Though many talked of the need to limit family size, for example, the girls planned to be married, if not in high school, probably by the age of 18; they know little about birth control. Boys talked of the wisdom of marrying a little older, but still said they liked younger girls. Girls say they want to go out after school, but must be home to take care of younger siblings. Some say that they cannot tell their parents about problems, because their parents do not understand American ways. As a Hmong welfare worker told us:

> In families, there is a lot of confusion, if nothing else. In marriage, kids no longer ask the opinion of the parent. They get married before legal age. They don't tell the parents about what they do in school. There is lots of confusion. Parents don't know what limits or authority they have.

Most of the students agreed that they have a responsibility to take care of their parents, a traditional practice they do not see disappearing. The young people attending our meetings see young marriage and large families as persisting, and predicted many young families, still unprepared to enter the American workforce, will stay on welfare.

Though the students see their younger brothers and sisters as "Americanized," the young people who will become parents in the next five or ten years still belong to a group who predictably will continue to experience difficulty in becoming self-sufficient in the Orange County context. Without more conseling and help in high school, they predicted, their problems would be greater.

The successful high school and college students we talked to intend to use their skills to help the Hmong community in any way they can, but they still need help. They would like Hmong to be the ones responsible for the upcoming generation of Hmong, rather than continuing to leave so much problem-solving in the hands of Americans. There is a strong desire to help themselves. A young man explained:

> I think we know it's hard, and we all want a college education. We understand that we might go in the wrong direction and we are worried about that. We want to go in the right direction.

A Hmong mother stated the following:

> I feel sad, because I don't speak English, so I cannot speak out my mind to the person who can help me. I feel sad because my husband separated from me and I am separated from my parents. I feel difficult, because my husband did not give me an opportunity to create an ability for myself first, and I am now in a situation I cannot cope with. I feel happy, because I have brought my children from death to the world of opportunity and freedom. I hope that they will find a modern life in this beautiful land.

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